

“WHEN THE HOPE IS PURE HYPE”

By Susan Dane Setin

Why would people even try to sell a product that promises us we can be a millionaire, look like a movie star, have the sexual drive of a twenty-year-old when we're seventy, live in perpetual light and peace and along the way inspire six billion other people to “go get theirs?”

- Because it's a great sell! No one has it and everyone wants it!
- Because people buy what they don't have, even if the product is only an idea.
- Because in depressed times, *the public buys positive*.

Selling hope is big business. In these times when the obstacles seem so great that they sap personal resolve, the mere *hope* of control helps us hang on. And this is precisely what most of us are doing . . . *hanging on*. We settle for an unrealistic idealism that things can be great, instead of confronting, at a practical level, the fact that they are not even good. The assertion that if we change our thinking, we will change our world may be a comforting promise, but it is a false one. No matter how hard we try, we never reach our objective, because no matter how rich we get, we are never rich enough, or thin enough, or sexy enough. No matter how much we have, we never have everything we really, *really* want. Our thoughts can never get positive enough to get us everything we want because *our wants stay one step ahead of our thoughts*—even our positive thoughts.

The underlying premise of all our “getting” teachings—whether it is getting better, more stuff, or even getting spiritual—is a simple one: We *can* if we *will*. Think about it for a minute.

WE CAN IF WE WILL.

This may sound good at first—full of exciting promise. But written into that promise is another one: if we are responsible for our successes, who is responsible for our failures? We are of course. And when more is the measure, fail we will—often. The problem, we are told, is never with the revelation, the teaching or principle—whichever one we might be subscribing to. The principle, we are told, is always perfect. The system is scientific. The shortcoming lies with us. Falling short of our goals is the sure sign that we aren't doing enough. We need to do more, more often. And we *can* do more, more often. We can do it all. We can do it all, *all the time*. We can control the universe if we just...

Stop.

Just the opposite is the case. We are not failing our systems. Our systems are failing us. We can never get where Personal Empowerment promises to take us, because what self-empowerment promises is not possible. Spirituality is not about self-empowerment at all. It is about self-*change*. Spirituality is not about us “creating our own reality” or “controlling the universe” because Spirit is not something we use to make life go the way *we* want. It's not about getting what we want because one, our wants change so fast even God can't keep up with them and two, spirituality is not a “thing” and certainly not a thing we can *get*. Spirituality does not simply exchange negative paradigms for positive ones. Genuine spirituality has a different starting point altogether. After decades of so much earnest searching, our pop-systems—even the latest discussion of “soul”—have not yet arrived at the place from which we need to begin. The irony is we are too far down the road.

This is what “Personal Empowerment” took from us. It tried to give us God by making us God. And in so doing, we lost God altogether. We went from chanting that sunny days were just around the corner, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, to chanting that we, ourselves, could pull up the sun. We were wrong on both counts.

We have taken an enormous detour. We need to find our way back.

We are not God. And we can't grow ourselves up to become God in order to use God's powers for our own purposes. Even more absurd, is the premise that we can positive-think our way into spirituality. If you have been trying to do this, then you know that what I am saying

is true. We have exercised, visualized, meditated, and prayed. We have practiced breathing, relaxing, focusing our minds, clearing our minds, affirming our true nature, and listening to the right talk radio.

For all our diligence and earnest striving, for all our affirmations and positive thinking, for all our revved-up exclamations that “we are already perfect, we just have to realize it,” in our deepest, more honest moments when we stand naked with ourselves, stripped of our positivisms and desperate rhetoric, we all know better.

The truth is that personal empowerment has not effected the transformation we had hoped it would. We are not all that different than before. At best, we are only different sometimes. We are still hungry. We are still longing. We are still empty. Because, although it is true that Self-Help can sometimes make us better, Self-Help cannot make us free. That task is God’s alone.

And God is not a system.

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